Aslan, Toma (c. 1846–1898)

ADRIAN NEAGU

Toma Aslan is considered the first Seventh-day Adventist convert in the territory of today's Romania, as well as the first Adventist pastor there.
Early Life

It is presumed that Toma Aslan was born in 1846 in Pitești, in the Garabet Hagi Aslan family. His father was an Armenian merchant and one of the founders of the Armenian church in Pitești.1

Driven by a strong desire to know God, Toma and his brother, Mitiță, started a journey on foot toward Mount Athos, but their father turned them back after they walked less than 200 kilometers. This happened before 1870.2

Conversion and Early Impact

In 1870 a Polish man who spoke French entered their shop located in downtown Pitești, and Toma invited him to his family’s house to teach them French. The mysterious Polish man was Michael Belina Czechowski, a former Adventist pastor and an itinerant missionary who preached the Seventh-day Adventist beliefs in Europe. It seems that Czechowski baptized Toma and Mitiță in 1870, and their brother, Tache, in 1872. Czechowski remained in Pitești until 1875 and gathered a group of believers in the Aslan house. The attendants kept the Adventist beliefs even after Czechowski’s departure and death.3

In 1879 two Italian pioneer Adventists, Dr. Herbert P. Ribton and Romualdo Bertola, visited the group of believers, and Bertola baptized a few newly converted people. Bertola later reported that the baptized people had already been Sabbath-keepers who found about Adventist beliefs by reading the Signes du Temps magazine.4

In 1881, Toma Aslan wrote a letter to the Signes du Temps editorial board in which he presented his beliefs, which were similar to the beliefs of those who published this magazine. He also mentioned in the letter about the existence of the group, 13 members at that time and a few visitors, that had been formed in Pitești. In the same year, Toma Aslan sent another letter to the French magazine of the Adventist Europeans, together with a few booklets written in Romanian.5

As a result of this correspondence, Toma Aslan was invited to attend the 10th General Conference Session of the European Adventists, held in Basel between October 19 and 23, 1883. On this occasion, Toma Aslan asked for the publication of a magazine in Romanian. Consequently, from 1884 to 1888, the magazine Adevărul Prezent was published quarterly, Toma Aslan being its main editor and translator.

In the spring of 1884, George I. Butler, the president of the General Conference, decided to visit Pitești and he gathered information about Toma Aslan and the work of his group.6

Further Impact

Thanks to Toma Aslan’s participation at the Adventist Conference in Switzerland, and at his insistence, it was deemed necessary to send an experienced pastor to Romania—someone who was at least a French speaker so that he could be easily translated and also help to consolidate the missionary activities in Romania. This request was honored in 1884 when A. C. Bourdeau arrived in Pitești as a missionary—his profile matching the needs to be fulfilled. He worked for a while in Pitești and in the surrounding cities, appointing Toma Aslan as the elder of the group. In this way, Bourdeau succeeded in officially organizing the first Adventist church in the Romanian territory. Before leaving Romania, he invited Toma Aslan to join him on the next missionary trip that he was going to take to Italy.8

A. C. Bourdeau appeared in 1885, in various reports, as the minister in charge for Romania? In the same reports, Toma Aslan appeared for the first time as an assistant pastor for four successive years (until 1888). In 1886, Aslan attended the Third European Council as a representative of Romania. Together with A. C. Bourdeau, he presented reports about the work in Romania. According to records dated in 1887, Toma Aslan further appeared as the representative of the Publishing Society for Romania.

In 1886, Conradi visited Pitești and was amazed by the warm welcome that was given to him by the believers, and he befriended the Aslan family. At this point, there is a gap in the flow of information about Aslan and the group of believers from Pitești. Because of persecution, part of the church members moved to Bucharest, while it seems that another part emigrated.10

Conradi visited Bucharest again in the fall of 1891, making various attempts to find Toma Aslan, but without success. However, he found him in 1893. Meeting Conradi again, Aslan would reestablish contact with the Seventh-day Adventist church in Europe, again becoming actively involved in the preparation of publications in Romanian. During 1895 to 1896, for instance, he coordinated the translation of some important titles in Romanian, among them Steps to Christ.11

The last information regarding Toma Aslan comes from H. P. Holser, who stated that Aslan visited Bucharest in 1898. It seems that soon after that, Aslan passed away, probably because of tuberculosis. From the family’s memories it is known that he was about 52 years old.12
**SOURCES**


Conradi, Ludwig R. “A Visit to Rumania.” *ARH*, January 12, 1892.


**NOTES**


3. See in Adrian Neagu, “In the Name of Right Faith against Real Faith: The Persecution of Seventh-day Adventists in Romania during the Interwar Period.” In *Contours of European Adventism: Issues in the History of the Denomination on the Old Continent*, eds., Stefan Höschele and Chigemezi N. Wogu (Möckern-Friedensau: Institute of Adventist Studies, Friedensau Adventist University, 2020), 172-173. During this time, Czechowski arranged the marriage of Ana Pigeron with the baron Luciano Prato, who was a railway engineer and a very close friend of the Aslan family. However, the marriage would not last but a year or two, enough time for one child to be born. The child would go back to Switzerland with his mother and his grandmother. Throughout this time, the grandmother had seemingly lived with her daughter in Pitești, as well. C.f. Popa, *Biografii ale pionierilor*.


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